

Christine and Aaron Stuart, A young couple getting started with an in-town duplex and a home occupation



Aaron and Christine Stuart can't imagine why some communities want to prohibit duplexes or apartments -or home occupations. Christine and Aaron Stuart met at the University of New Hampshire. Christine, now 28, grew up in Stratham, and Aaron, 29, had lived in

Greenfield and in Massachusetts. The couple married after graduating from college and, seeking a change of scene, spent some time in San Diego. But the Stuarts quickly discovered that the traffic, sprawl, and personality of the people in Southern California were not for them. "We realized we wanted to stay in New England

- in New Hampshire," explains Christine. They now own their own home in Exeter, the next town to Stratham where her family still resides, and the town where she attended junior and senior high school.

The couple first rented an apartment on the same street in the heart of Exeter where they now own a duplex. "We wanted to buy instead of renting," stresses Christine. She teaches violin, and Aaron is a recreational therapist working with troubled adolescents at Hampstead Hospital. Finding a house they could afford was a major challenge. In 2001 they bought their duplex and began fixing it up. They live in the one-bedroom downstairs apartment and rent out the two-bedroom upstairs apartment. They finished the second-story over the detached garage to provide a studio for

Christine. In this quiet setting, she meets with her young violin students for private lessons. Christine says the relationships she has developed with her students and their families have already connected her more closely to the community and region.

"We couldn't have bought a house without the rental income," Christine says of their duplex purchase. They would like someday to build a home in a more rural setting. But for now, they are grateful to be able to own their own home and invest their sweat equity, and they enjoy being able to walk to their favorite sushi restaurant downtown. For the future, Aaron figures he can make some modifications to the larger upstairs apartment to accommodate their needs when they are ready to start a family.